

U.S. Defector in Moscow Is Pictured as a Paranoid in Wife's Testimony in Florida Divorce Case

By PETER GROSE

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Dec. 4—Last October the Soviet Union announced the defection of an American named John Discoe Smith, identifying him as a disillusioned agent of the Central Intelligence Agency.

Articles by and about him began to appear in the Soviet Press. Reporting details of alleged United States espionage activities.

The United States Government issued routine denials that Mr. Smith had been a C.I.A. agent; the State Department dismissed his accounts of assassinations and a military plot to overthrow the government of India. A spokesman called the stories "fatuous allegations."

Reminiscences of old friends and evidence in court records indicate that Mr. Smith, who is from Quincy, Mass., is a confused and troubled man who grew suspicious of wife and family and everything American life had to offer.

His story, as pieced together from Soviet and United States evidence, is one of personal tragedy, not of high politics.

Fixed Code Machines

"He was really a clean-cut American boy, though I hate to sound trite," said one friend who had known him in the United States Embassy in New Delhi 10 years ago. "He was a nice guy around the place. No interest in politics at all."

State Department files show that he was a Foreign Service employee, a communications technician, until early in 1969.

He used to fix all the gadget, the code machines and that sort of thing." This friend, a career diplomat, said.

"He might have seen occasional messages as he worked on the machines, but he certainly had no regular access to what the diplomatic traffic was all about, nor did he seem particularly interested."

Mr. Smith left his wife and disappeared from his familiar surroundings in the summer of 1960. He had been asked to resign from the Foreign Service after a government psychiatrist had declared him a paranoid with all-consuming suspicions.

His last known address, dating from 1961, was "care of American Express, Rome."

The Russians say he traveled the world—Australia, South Africa and elsewhere—before finding a home in Moscow. He has now become a Soviet citizen, they say. They have not disclosed exactly when he reached the Soviet Union.

Court Records Found

Why did he defect? Part of the answer is contained in the records of the Pinellas County Circuit Court at Clearwater, Fla., in September, 1961, Mary London Smith obtained a divorce, uncontested, from Mr. Smith.

Just before their legal separation 16 months earlier, Mrs. Smith told the court, he was studying to become a Roman Catholic. He was a Mason; he spoke of joining the fraternal order of the Knights of Pythias.

Mrs. Smith said he had confided the philosophy to her "that you had to join these great big organizations, even if they were in opposition to each other, just in order to be in with all the big people, you see, so you couldn't be attacked by anyone."

"The Masons would protect him, and the Catholics would protect him," she said, interpreting what he had told her.

The same divorce proceedings point to the origin of the charges that Mr. Smith is now making in the Soviet press.

"He had the impression that everybody was working for the Central Intelligence Agency,

that they were out to get him," Mrs. Smith told the court. "He

thought that I was in their secret employ, that I was reporting on him constantly. He thought I was drugging his food, and he also thought that at cocktail parties I paid other people to do it."

In his recent statements in Moscow Mr. Smith called his wife a "regular employee" of the C.I.A.

In response to a question from the Florida judge six years ago — "have you ever been a member of the C. I. A.?" — Mrs. Smith replied, "No, I haven't."

Mr. Smith and Mary London were married in New Delhi on May 28, 1955. She was a secretary in the political section of the Embassy, he traveled through South Asia for the

United States Government, maintaining and installing communications equipment, including code machines.

They were a popular couple at Embassy parties in the early years, living in an American compound for embassy staff, called "The Taj." They had one child, Ellen, born in December, 1956.

Starting the next year, Mrs. Smith said, he started drinking heavily and accusing her of being a spy.

The Soviet account of his experiences, published in Izvestia last month, puts the admitted change in his outlook in a different light.

"All his being, which was honest and healthy on the whole, rose up in revolt against the dirty work, the meanness

and the false life of most of acquaintances," Izvestia said.

Mr. and Mrs. Smith were transferred from India to the United States Embassy in Vienna in November, 1959. A few weeks later, according to Mrs. Smith's testimony, they were ordered back to the United States on the advice of the embassy's consulting psychiatrist.

"He told me that John was in an acute stage of paranoia, that I should take him home," Mrs. Smith said. Then, according to the court records, he was asked to resign from the Foreign Service.

The couple drove from Washington to Clearwater, where Mrs. Smith's parents live. She said he refused to go to his home in Quincy. He moved out

of their home soon afterward and separation proceedings began.

Only when the Russians began publishing Mr. Smith's account did Mrs. Smith and her parents learn what had become of him.

United States officials believe that Mr. Smith's account is a Soviet reply to the publicity given to the recent defection in West Germany of a Soviet intelligence officer, Lieut. Col. Yevgeny Y. Runge.

Since most of Mr. Smith's account deals with alleged espionage activity in India, these officials also see it as a Soviet attempt to set the Indian Government on guard against alleged Western intelligence operations.



John Discoe Smith in a photo cabled from Moscow last month and right, identity card